

October 4, 2015 2:00 p.m. St. Augustine Cathedral

Diocesan Golden Wedding Anniversary Mass

Bishop Bradley's Reflections on the Readings of 27th Sunday of Year;
Gospel: John 15:12-17

As I said at the beginning of Mass, I'm so very happy to welcome all of you here to St. Augustine Cathedral. This is one of the events that I look forward to celebrating so much every year----it's a great, happy event, and it's one that brings people together for such an important reason---to celebrate the most basic and essential aspect of human life, and our faith life: to celebrate Marriage and Family Life. In addition to the 108 couples we know are celebrating 50 years of married life, I understand that we have 2 couples celebrating 55 years, 3 celebrating 60 years, and 2 celebrating 65 years. During this Mass, we ask God's blessings upon all the Jubilarian couples who are here, as well as those celebrating this special milestone but who were unable for one reason or another to be with us today. May God bless you all.

I'd like to ask all those who are here for this Mass who are not celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary, or beyond, to please stand. Dear Jubilarians, we, your children, grandchildren, relatives and brothers and sisters in the Family of Faith, take this occasion to give you a standing ovation in recognition of all that you have accomplished throughout your 50 years of Marriage. Please join me in applause....That "ovation", my dear Jubilarians, obviously comes from our heart and expresses our deep admiration, our sincere appreciation, and our genuine affection in a way that words might fail us. Congratulations! Thank you! And God Bless you!

How wonderful it is that this year's Golden Wedding Anniversary celebration comes on the heels of Pope Francis' incredibly moving and successful recent Pastoral Visit to the United States. At this time last Sunday, Pope Francis was getting ready to celebrate the Final Mass to

conclude the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia. The night before, he presided over the Festival of Families filled with Music, Testimonials from families representing each Continent, and an amazingly and profoundly beautiful Reflection on Family Life by Pope Francis---a kind of catechesis, or instruction---on the value and essential importance of Marriage and Family Life to the Church and to Society. And while we are here celebrating this Mass honoring and celebrating our faithful married couples and your families, at this same time in Rome, the Ordinary Synod on the Family is just beginning. Over the course of these next 3 weeks, Bishops and Married couples from all over the world, representing the Church Universal, will be meeting with Pope Francis to talk about the Vocation and Mission of the Family. So, while we pray for one another and all married couples celebrating 50 years of marriage in our Diocese, let us also pray for the blessing of God's Holy Spirit to guide these important discussions and deliberations so that we can find new ways to reach out with the support and strength of our Faith to help Marriage and Family Life to remain strong in spite of the challenges and attacks it continues to face in our current culture and society.

I assume that some of you have already celebrated your 50th anniversary earlier this year, and that some of you may still be looking forward to that actual anniversary day in the months to come. And on that momentous anniversary day, you probably already had, or are planning to have, a big Family celebration. With those celebrations, involving your family and those closest to you in your lives, I'm sure there is lots of time to reminisce, right? You naturally think back to that special day 50 years ago, in 1965 (when the world was far different that it is in 2015), and perhaps re-live the moments of your wedding day---your honeymoon----those early days, months and first years of establishing a new home and beginning to raise a family. And I'm sure that you also reminisce about the good times, and the bad times; the

joys, and the sorrows; the times of success, and the moments of some temporary defeats----over these 50 years.

During one of his many beautiful talks last week while here in the United States, Pope Francis said much about the witness of marriage. To paraphrase, the witness of 50 years of marriage is an amazing witness to all that is True and Good and Beautiful. It is beautiful to see such great love, such great beauty, such great goodness, such great truth witnessed here. Even in the troubled times of marriage, the fact that you loved through those struggles, through the heartaches that sometimes accompany marriage signals that Truth, Beauty, Goodness, Love wins the day. Continue to be that witness to future generations that struggle to see the lifelong witness of marriage. Remember always the joy of your first encounter with your loved one, but also the joy of the first encounter with Jesus Christ. Continue to live these Joys in the everyday life of your marriages. Through your witness you preach more boldly, with more voice, and with greater power than any preacher on a Sunday.

My dear Jubilarians, I pray that our Holy Father's words resonate in your hearts. I would highlight 2 points Pope Francis made.

1) Remember the joy of your first encounter----both when you first met your future spouse----what that was like----how you fell in love----how you moved toward the decision to enter into marriage. But Pope Francis equates another "first encounter" with your spouse. Pope Francis also tells you to remember your first encounter with Jesus Christ. In a Sacramental Marriage, it is through your love for one another---and through all the generous and faithful choices that you make every day of your married life---that you are able to see and love Jesus Himself. Our Lord Jesus lives in your marriage; and your faithful, generous love for one another helps to reveal Jesus to the world. 2) The second point Pope Francis made that I think is so important is when he asks you to continue to be a witness to the beauty, truth, goodness

and love of marriage to those who struggle to see the value of marriage. Your very lives---your Marriage---is a Witness to the world. And, as Pope Francis went on to say, what you “say” through the Witness of your marriage is more important, and more inspiring and a more profound “sermon” to the world than *any* Deacon, Priest, Bishop or Pope could preach at Mass! That’s quite a statement---and we all know it’s so true!

Today’s Scripture Readings, which are the Readings for the 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time (except for the Gospel passage) are so appropriate for today’s celebration. There are two points I would focus on, one from the First Reading and the other from the Gospel Reading.

Our First Reading took us back to the Book of Genesis---to the very beginning of the history of the human world----to the apex of God’s Creation, which was the human person. But even the human person left something to be desired---as great as the human person was, made in the very image and likeness of God, there was something incomplete---something lacking. And that’s when God said: *“It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make a suitable partner for him.”* Once human creation was completed by creating woman, and the woman was given to the man, his exclamation sums up the perfection of creation: *“This one, at last, is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh....That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife and the two of them become one flesh.”* God created humanity with a plan----that we would be able to live together in peace and harmony “two by two”. And as husband and wife “cling” to one another in Love and through the results of that same love, that they would establish their Family, and teach them God’s ways, and raise them to live together in Love. And “two by two”, “family by family”, the Plan is that the entire Family of Humankind would then live together in Peace.

That is exactly what each of you has done to one degree or another---you have found each other, fallen in love, and made a home with that person about whom you exclaimed: At last---this is the one who completes me---I will leave my father and mother and “cling” to this person, and establish our life together based completely on Love and Trust. And while there might be great moments of huge successes or accomplishments in your married life, what has been the most important are those day-in and day-out signs of your love for one another, which provide the glue which keeps your love together.

The simple love that is fostered over 50 years of marriage shows the love of God to others. It is in the little things that are done as part of the marriage, little acts of love. The holding of a hand, the grabbing of a blanket to keep the other warm, the smile on a hard day, the listening ear, the cooking of a meal, the hug on a bad day, the making of coffee, all point to the sacrificial love given to God through the Cross of His Son. These little sacrifices are noticed by others and point others to the ultimate love of God.

And that leads to the 2nd point from today’s Readings. In today’s Gospel, Jesus said something very similar and much more profound: *“This is my commandment: love one another AS I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.”*

In just a minute, I will invite you to renew the Vows you first made 50 years (or more) ago on your wedding day. When you first said: “I Do”, you had no idea what would come your way, yet, you said “I Do”. And every day of these last 50 years, you have said “I Do” again and again and again.

For 50 years, you have kept your vows to love each other faithfully and generously.

For the past 600 months, you have loved each other for better and for worse;

For 2,600 weeks, you have supported each other for richer and for poorer;

For 18,250 days, you have been there for each other in sickness and in health.

And without counting the hours, minutes and seconds, no matter how we count it up, from the first “I Do” 50 years ago, until the “I Do” you will say on your final day in this world, you are doing what Jesus told us makes us just like Him: you are laying down your life for your friend/for your beloved spouse.

My dear Jubilarians, in the name of the Church, I thank you for your Lifetime of Love. And I thank you for the powerful “Sermon” you have preached and continue to preach to the world. As you reminisce about all that has been, as you take comfort in the love you have for one another, and as you help one another to take comfort in your love for Jesus, may God give you the grace and the strength to keep “clinging” to one another even as you love one another with the same, sacrificial and generous love of Jesus for us and all the world.

God bless you, now and always!

Faithfully yours in Christ,

+ Bishop Paul J. Bradley